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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the provision of early childhood education and care (educare) for black preschool children in South Africa. After a brief introduction, the essay outlines the demographics of and government role in preschool education. The social and environmental context of black preschool children in South Africa, along with the educational implications of this context, are then discussed. Arguments for the adoption of early childhood educare intervention programs, and the dynamics of possible programs, are considered. The effects of early educare programs on young children are also highlighted. Finally, the major components of the preschool learning environment (play areas, daily schedules, instructional materials, teachers and staff, and parent/community involvement) are presented and discussed. Contains 30 references. (MDM)

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5 Providing early childhood educare services for the black preschool child

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FRAMEWORK

1	Introduction	118
2	Preschool demographics in South Africa	119
3	Preschool educare in South Africa	121
4	Growing up as a black preschool child in South Africa – the social and environmental context	121
5	Educational implications of this context	124
6	The aims of preschool educare	125
7	Arguments for early childhood educare intervention programmes for children	126
8	An emerging perspective for the provision of educare services in South Africa	128
	8.1 Educare provision options for parents and children	128
9	Effects of early educare programmes on children	130
	9.1 Evidence from similar studies	131
10	Creating an environment for socio-educational development	134
	10.1 Play areas	134

10.2	The daily routine	135
10.2.1	Free play	135
10.2.2	Supervised creative activities	136
10.2.3	Music and movement	136
10.2.4	Ring times	136
10.2.5	Essential routines	136
10.2.6	Outside play	137
10.3	Materials	137
10.4	The teacher/educare worker	137
10.5	Parent and community involvement in educare	138
11	Summary and conclusion	140
Bibliography		140

1 Introduction

The first six years of life are of vital importance in the development of the young child. During these years the foundation is laid for the child's development. It is the period during which the most intense physical and intellectual development takes place. During these years development is more rapid than during any other period of life; and deprivations have lasting effects on the child. Recognition of the importance of these early years and the benefits of access to educare programmes, coupled with changes in the patterns of employment of women has resulted in the development of early childhood educare programmes and facilities throughout the world.

Early childhood educare provides opportunities for children to develop fully and is aimed at giving the young child the best possible preparation for the future. The perception was realized over a century ago when Lord Henry Brougham, in a widely circulated manifesto of 1923, wrote that "... the truth is that he [the child] can and does learn a great deal more before that age [six years] than all he ever learns or can learn in all his after life. His attention is more easily aroused, his memory is retentive, bad habits are not yet formed, nor is his judgement warped by unfair bias" (Forest 1929:49).

Bowman supports this contention: "In just a few short years, a child goes from being a helpless infant to being an active, independent, competent six-year-old. In no other six years of life must human beings learn so much so fast or will so much of the future depend on what has been learned in the past" (Bowman 1987:3).

Biesheuwel (1978) expands on this, suggesting that anything attempted after the age of six is unlikely to make up for earlier deprivation. This is supported by Chazan who writes that "Lack of adequate

cognitive stimulation in the early years may not only adversely affect the child at that time but may also prevent him from benefiting fully from what the school has to offer once he has reached the age of entry into the educational system. His initial adjustment may be poor and his subsequent educational progress limited" (Chazan *et al.* 1971:3).

The provision of education and care during the early years has also been taken up in the human rights debate. A popular poster outlining the 1959 *Declaration of Children's Rights* reads: "All children have the right to a name, enough to eat, and a decent place to live. All children should be looked after when they are sick, and have the right to grow up with love, affection and security ... All children have a right to free education and should be protected from neglect, cruelty and exploitation". During the International Year of the Child (1979) a call went out for children to enjoy "affection, love and understanding, adequate nutrition and medical care, free education and full opportunity for play and recreation".

More recently the *Convention of the Rights of the Child* (1989) in Article 28 calls on State Parties to recognize the child's right to education. State Parties are asked to respect and ensure these rights for each child ... without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. At the same time, a statement on Early Childhood Care and Education, released by the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC), states that "Endemic community violence, the ravages of poverty, the absence of the basic necessities of life such as food, water, good health and sanitation, decent housing and the manifest neglect of opportunities for the early education of our young children have become the predominant features of the lives of the seven million children of preschooling age in South Africa". (NECC Statement on Early Childhood Care and Education, 24 October 1990).

2 Preschool demographics in South Africa

The population of South Africa is approximately 35 million. Of this total, some 6,4 million (18 per cent of the total population) are children of preschool age. Table 1 indicates the extent of the preschool (birth to 6 years of age) population group in South Africa using the previous population classification categories[1].

1 The racial terms as used in this chapter are for comparative purposes and do not imply the author's acceptance of the categorization.

Table 1: Preschool population of South Africa

	0–5 YEARS	5–6 YEARS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
African	4 513 900	790 500	5 304 400	83%
Coloured	396 000	73 800	469 800	7%
Indian	105 400	20 700	126 100	2%
White	412 600	78 600	491 200	8%
Total	5 427 900	963 600	6 391 500	100%

Source: Short 1992:31

The regional distribution of black children in South Africa is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Regional distribution of black children in South Africa – 1992

NUMBERS CHANGE AS FOLLOWS:	
Western Cape	88 800
Eastern Cape	1 180 200
Northern Cape	143 100
Orange Free State	360 000
Natal	1 225 000
PWV	883 800
Eastern Transvaal	208 200
Northern Transvaal	859 000
Western Transvaal	263 300
TOTAL[2]	5 211 400

Source: Adapted from Short 1992

It is clear that, given the demand for access to quality education, the provision of preschool educare services in the future will need to be targeted mainly at black children.

2 In the report by Short (1992) this figure differs from her earlier total by 13 000 children (or ,25%).

3 Preschool educare in South Africa

A major study into the design of an economically feasible system of preschool educare provision in South Africa by Van den Berg and Vergnani (1986) described the existing preschool situation as being characterized by various distinctive features. In recording these features, they write that:

(i) Preschool education and care is segregated as a matter of state policy.
(ii) Preschool provision is fragmented among a bewildering array of departments and bodies.
(iii) State preschool provision is totally inadequate.
(iv) State preschool provision occurs inversely proportional to need, the most resources being provided for the most advantaged statutory population group.
(v) State preschool provision is characterized by insistence on standards that are inflexible and totally unrealistic for the majority of those who wish to provide preschool services for their children, thus further consolidating inequality and deprivation.
(vi) State preschool provision significantly lacks co-ordination and co-operation, and does not seek to provide a comprehensive and integrated service.
(vii) State preschool provision is characterized by an absence of democratic participation in that services are provided for and very seldom in consultation with people, let alone by them with support from the State.

The number of black children in educare provision is estimated as 405 746, which is 7 per cent of the 0–6 year age cohort (NEPI 1992:12).

4 Growing up as a black preschool child in South Africa – the social and environmental context

It is important to understand the social and political contexts in which black preschool children grow up during their most formative years. Newspaper reports during a two-week period in early 1992 illustrate this context vividly.

Headlines included the following:

- Criminal acts against children have increased by 130 cases during the past year (*Weekly Mail*, 31 January 1992).
- Cases of serious assault, child neglect, rape and sodomy of children under the age of 14 increased by 54 per cent last year (*Daily Dispatch*, 4 February 1992).

- Three children, aged between six and eleven, were shot dead today while being driven to school (*Argus*, 5 February 1992).
- During the past ten days there have been shocking reports of child abandonment, rising numbers of child abuse cases, and the deaths of children in violence in Natal (*Natal Mercury*, 8 February 1992).
- Two Eldorado Park children who were abducted last week ... may have been the victims of a gruesome sexual ritual murder (*The Star*, 12 February 1992).
- At least 15 children, some as young as three years, were severely burnt by chemical substances while playing at a dump in Alexandra (*Sowetan*, 6 February 1992).
- An eight-year-old girl was shot dead on her way to school when police opened fire to disperse taxi drivers (*City Press*, 9 February 1992).
- Younger children are becoming drug users as pushers stake out playgrounds ... children in Cape Town as young as 8 are taking Mandrax and sniffing substances like Tippex regularly (*South*, 27 February 1992).

Besides the overt violence of the environment, structural violence, abuse and neglect are highly visible. The young black child has often started life in the womb of a woman who is herself a victim of racial, economic and gender oppression. The child will be born into poverty and squalor and will grow up watching his/her parents struggle for survival. His/her parents are likely to be unemployed or will exist on the meagre earnings of a sole breadwinner or the pension of an aged grandparent. Nutritious food, running water, electricity, a warm bed and story time – the ingredients of a normal childhood – will be absent. There will be no doctor nearby, no hospital or clinic, no chemist or dentist, and no money to pay for these services anyway. Often only one tap will serve a whole community. There may be toilets, but hardly ever a sewage system. His/her community will probably have been uprooted, and many families broken up. An increasing number of refugees fleeing continuous violence will be present. Children are eye-witnesses to this violence and are often its victims as well. When parents are at work (if they are fortunate enough) this child will either be left alone at home or left to fend for himself/herself on the township streets; in the care of an infirm and aged relative or, if available, in a custodial care facility. A preschool educare service is not likely to exist.

Official infant and child mortality rates for black children in 1989 were 52 and 54 per cent respectively (Department of National Health and Population Development 1992: 4 & 24). These figures are likely to be underestimates, and the statistics for the child mortality rate exclude black children in the TVBC states where the rate is much higher.

The UNICEF figures for 1988, for example, were 71 (IMR) and 95 (USMR) respectively (UNICEF 1990:37) These children were most likely to have died of malnutrition, gastroenteritis, gastro-intestinal diseases, nutritional diseases, and pneumonia. Communities have the following additional problems:

- **High rates of crime:** Rates are amongst the highest in the world with theft, rape and murder being very common. As a result people are scared to move around.
- **Unavailability of jobs:** This is a major problem in both urban and rural communities with rates of around 60 per cent in most areas.
- **Low salaries:** Approximately 40 per cent of households earn below R8 503 per annum (Lategan 1990:11) i.e. below basic living costs.
- **Lack of proper housing and facilities:** The housing shortage is acute and in most areas where black children live; there are no public facilities or amenities. Informal settlements abound and as many people as live in proper houses are now living in shacks. These communities usually have communal bucket lavatories serving up to 30 people each, and communal water taps serving up to 60 people each. This makes it almost impossible to maintain reasonable standards of hygiene and health.
- **Juvenile delinquency:** Caused by the alienation of youth.
- **Lack of transport:** In rural areas this is a particularly serious problem because of the vast distances and the expense in using taxis.
- **Overcrowding/housing shortage:** Often up to 15 persons live in a dwelling, resulting in little or no privacy.
- **Other social problems** that are directly related to the absence of infrastructure, facilities and services include: family breakdown, teenage pregnancies, child neglect and abandonment, ill-treatment, uncontrollable behaviour, non-payment of maintenance, and alcoholism and truancy.

In the rural areas the problems are more basic. These include shortages of water for domestic use, food, adequate shelter, and sanitation. Other problems that occur are most often more severe than in the urban areas.

A child growing up in such conditions, like his more than six million peers, will be expected to enter the formal school system (itself inadequate and under-resourced) and to perform competently. These problems are the legacy of the former policy of apartheid, and are compounded by economic recession and growing lawlessness by youths who were once preschoolers who grew up under similar conditions.

Zuma (1991:1) has written that "Children are the most important treasure that each generation has to invest in for the very survival of the human race. The investment in the well-being, education and skills development of children is fundamental to the economic prosperity, the political stability, and the environmental integrity of Africa".

Early childhood educare provision is advocated so that children can be given the proper support to succeed at school. Early childhood intervention is essential if the disadvantaged child is to be enabled to develop his/her full socio-educational potential and to contribute productively to society.

5 Educational implications of this context

The educational implications of the context in which the black child develops are largely negative. Owing to inadequate nutrition and health care the child's physical condition is often poor, thereby lowering energy and vitality. The child also lacks the experiences necessary for optimal cognitive development. In turn, language development is negatively affected. The result is a child who is not school ready and is therefore unable to keep pace at school. This leads to school failure and early drop-out.

The educational implications of this context are most explicity manifested in the high failure and drop-out rates for black primary school children, and in the number of children who leave school without gaining functional literacy. In a major research study, Taylor (1989) records the high drop-out and failure rate for black children at the end of their first year at primary school. Almost a quarter of black African children who enter the first grade (Sub A) do not reach the second grade (Sub B) the following year. Many of these children disappear from the formal schooling system altogether at this stage. Table 3 indicates the primary school survival rates for black African children who entered school in 1960, 1970 and 1980.

From Table 3 it can be seen that the transition rate from the first to the second grade (Sub A to Sub B) exhibits the lowest survival rate between any two successive grades in the primary phase. A number of factors contribute to the high failure and drop-out rate. Lategan (1990:3) maintains that "Some of these factors relate to conditions internal to the education system (such as access to schools, teacher/pupil ratios, teacher qualifications, etc.) and some socio-economic conditions external to the education system (such as the education and income levels of their families)".

A consequence of this drop-out rate is the high rate of functional illiteracy for black South Africans. Taylor estimates that approximately 25 per

Table 3: Survival rates as a percentage of SSA enrolment for the groups who entered SSA in 1960, 1970 and 1980. All African children.

YEAR GROUP ENTERED SSA	SSA	SSB	STD 1	STD 2	STD 3	STD 4	STD 5
1960	100	75	68	55	42	32	26
1970	100	79	74	59	53	43	44
1980	100	79	75	64	63	54	49

Source: Taylor 1989:2

cent of African children grow up to be illiterate. He comments that "Within the school system, the low survival rate at first-grade level is the largest single factor which both retards student flow through the system and feeds the vast pool of illiterates in South Africa" (Taylor 1989:12).

Amongst other strategies, the provision of preschool educare services before school entry is advocated as a means of combating primary school drop-out and failure.

6 The aims of preschool educare

In contextualizing the situation for the young black preschool child in South Africa, a grim picture emerges. The question to be asked then is: What role can early childhood educare in its broadest developmental sense play in redressing the situation?

The general goal of preschool educare is defined as follows: "... to enrich the lives of individual children whose development would otherwise be adversely affected by detrimental socio-economic and cultural circumstances, and to show parents and communities how, besides giving love and devotion, they can best help their children to be successful in school and, ultimately, in their adult lives. As an ideal, community-based early childhood education programmes offer the hope that ignorance, poverty and disease can be reduced and the promise that even the most disadvantaged child can be helped to lead a fulfilling and worthwhile life. Thus, early childhood education, especially in developing countries, is much more than an end in itself. It is also a means for social development and improvement" (Van Leer Foundation 1981:2).

The objectives of preschool educare lie in the growth and development of children in four main areas: the cognitive, social, emotional and physical. In the preschool context these areas are developed through the medium of play.

Cognitively, preschool educare provides opportunities for optimal intellectual functioning through looking, listening and doing. The child's individual potential is focussed upon so that he/she may become "competent in body and mind – competent in doing, making and thinking skills, appropriate to his stage of development" (Boyes and Gadd 1982). Curiosity is encouraged, and the foundation is laid for sensory and perceptual learning, which leads to conceptualization and is the most ideal form of learning in early childhood. School readiness, particularly the adjustment of formal schooling, is enhanced.

Emotionally, preschool educare offers opportunities for children to develop their individuality, a positive self-concept and independence, and feelings of security and freedom. Self-confidence, self-control and self-discipline are established.

Socially, preschool educare provides opportunities for children to develop relationships, to learn how to relate to other children and adults, to develop self-esteem and a sense of worth, and the capacity to share and to co-operate.

Physically, preschool offers opportunities for becoming aware of and controlling the body, for activities designed to develop fine and gross motor movements and physical co-ordination, and positive attitudes towards health care and safety. The opportunity for the child to be adequately nourished is utilized by meeting the child's nutritional needs.

7 *Arguments for early childhood educare intervention programmes for children*

Despite the overwhelming evidence that early childhood intervention is beneficial to the development of disadvantaged children, there is, sadly, still a need to provide extensive arguments for investment in the early years. There are compelling social and economic arguments in favour of early intervention programmes and these have been advocated by noted educationists (Myers 1991; Barker 1985; Sharma 1991). These include:

- **The human rights argument:** Children have a right to develop to their full potential by growing up in a healthy and safe environment. Conditions that prevent optimal development when it could be promoted, violate basic human rights.
- **The moral argument:** Early childhood development programmes can help transmit moral and social values and can reverse the erosion of traditional values by providing environments where parents and communities can reinforce these cultural values.
- **The social equity argument: Disadvantaged environments cause poor children to lag behind their more advantaged counterparts.**

Gender-linked disparities in many cultures also inhibit development and educational opportunities for girls. Early childhood development programmes have the potential to help and correct such inequalities.

- **The economic argument:** Preventive programmes are found to be cost-effective in the longer term. These can reduce the need for expensive curative programmes. Preventive programmes also reduce low academic achievement, dropping out of school, the need for remedial intervention, juvenile deliquency, drug and alcohol abuse, and other forms of anti-social behaviour. Preschool children have also been found to be more likely to find employment and are less dependent on state aid than non-attenders. Barker (1985) argues that the rate of return on the education and care of preschool children is higher than at any other level of education. Further economic advantages follow from the increased family stability and personal security provided by parents who are more contented with the care of their children.
- **The programmic argument:** The effectiveness of health, nutrition, education and income-generating programmes can be improved through integration with early childhood intervention programmes. These programmes are often an important entry point for both community development activities and extension of primary health care.
- **The psychological development argument:** Another important consideration for initiating intervention programmes for young children is inspired by the idea that early childhood is the best time to break the cycle of poverty. Furthermore, because the child's early years are vital for the formation of the personality structure, intelligence and social behaviour, reaching the disadvantaged child at this early stage can then have a positive, formative effect on the child's future. Through early intervention, it should be possible to prepare the young child physically and mentally for effective learning in primary school, and to strengthen the task of supporting and feeding the family. When this is so, the chance of more complete child development and higher productivity increases, thus breaking the cycle of poverty.

Further justification for these arguments is found in the negative effects of economic recession all over the world in changing social conditions, and increased female participation in the labour force. Combined with sociocultural changes in the family pattern, these two factors result in non-availability of family support to take care of young children. Collectively, these factors provide a strong enough basis for investment in early childhood development services.

8 An emerging perspective for the provision of educare services in South Africa

Preschool educare takes place in a broad societal context in which a large proportion of the population (mainly blacks) suffers from extreme deprivation, poverty and malnutrition, inadequate housing, mediocre civic amenities, grossly inferior education and opportunities, inferior health services, and political exclusion (Bot 1987).

For this reason, no future preschool policy can be limited to new forms of provision or increased access. Changes must be effected in the political, social and economic sectors as well. An emerging policy perspective, which is becoming increasingly popular, is that the educare of the young child needs to be integrated with the health, welfare, economic and wider development of communities. From this perspective a comprehensive range of services would be provided for the child, the family and the community. Such services would include the basic needs of shelter, food, warmth, protection, and family support. Individual development and the social, political and economic empowerment of parents would be a specific objective.

Aims would include supporting and strengthening the family in its child-rearing function; preparation of young children for primary schooling; promotion of the healthy development of children including, if necessary, nutritional supplementation; and provision of the housing, facilities and services needed by families (NEPI 1992).

8.1 Educare provision options for parents and children

Within the developmental perspective there is a range of provision options with variations in location, duration and orientation.

- **Location:** Programmes can be either centre based or home based. Centre-based programmes operate from either single-purpose buildings (which could include custom-built buildings) or from multi-purpose buildings such as community halls and churches.
- **Duration:** Programmes can be offered at differing hours, the most common being either full-day (8–10 hours) or half-day (4–5 hours). Programmes can also be provided on each day of the week, two or three days a week, or for a few hours on only one day of the week.
- **Orientation:** Programmes can focus on children only – child orientated; on parents only – parent orientated; or on parents and children – dual orientation.

There are various permutations of the above and those included in the existing forms of provision in South Africa are as follows:

- **Pre-primary schools**, which operate half-days and term times only for children between the ages of three and six, and provide a child-orientated educational programme. Meals are not usually provided. These schools are usually run by the education departments of the various provincial administrations.
- **Pre-primary classes** attached to primary schools operate half-days and term times only for children who are to enter primary school the following year. A child-orientated educational programme with no meals is provided. These are run by education departments.
- **Centre-based educare** is usually provided on a full-day basis for the three- to six-year-old children of working parents. Some centres do, however, take children from birth. Children are provided with snacks and meals, educational activities appropriate to their needs, and the necessary care while their parents are at work. In half-day programmes a meal may be provided.
- **Home-based educare** is usually provided on a full-day basis for the newborn to three-year-old children of working parents. Some home educare workers do take children older than three years. In this option, up to six children are educated and cared for in a domestic home. Meals and other foods are provided, and educational activities that are appropriate to the needs of the children are offered. The home may be linked to an organization that provides training and support or it may operate independently.
- **Playgroups** normally take children between the ages of three and six for a few mornings or afternoons a week. Duration is usually two to three hours, and a play environment is created with education-socialization as the primary focus. Parents – usually mothers – may attend.
- **Family education programmes** help the child's main caregiver to provide good quality educare in the home. This option can involve parents and child; parents, child and other siblings; or a group of parents only.
- **Television and radio programmes** are offered in a range of languages and differ in quality. This is one area that needs to be assessed more thoroughly, particularly the benefits to children and parents.

Each of these options is valid and its utility depends on the needs of particular families.

In a previous work (Atmore 1989), the author advocated the principles that should underlie educare provision and programming and are particularly relevant in the context of South Africa's socio-economic context and the development perspective.

The principles are:

- Families in need must have priority of access to services and facilities.
- The community must decide which services are needed and must be involved in the organization and management thereof. This implies that communities are empowered to take control of educare.
- In planning and service delivery, the resources of each community must be maximally utilized.
- A wide range of alternative forms of provision must be provided to meet varying needs.

Myers (1991) lists three additional principles:

- Programmes should support and build upon local ways that have been devised to cope effectively with problems of child care and development.
- Programmes should be financially feasible and cost-effective.
- Programmes should try to reach the largest possible number of children who are at risk.

The actual need for full-day educare has been estimated to be between 14 and 30 per cent (Lategan 1990:4). This translates to between one and two million children of parents who work full-day.

The rest of this chapter focusses on full and part-day, centre-based educare provision in more detail.

9 Effects of early educare programmes on children

Several research studies have reported the positive effects of preschool educare provision. The best-known of these has been the *High/Scope Educational Research Foundation Perry Preschool Project* in the United States, which revealed that young children who were living in disadvantaged circumstances and had attended a good preschool programme at the ages of three and four outperformed similar children who had not done so, on intelligence and school achievement tests, primary-school success, commitment to schooling, and high-school success (Schweinhart & Weikart 1989). In a longitudinal experimental study in which children living in poverty were randomly assigned to either a preschool group or a no preschool group, it was found that by the age of 19, the preschool group had achieved a higher employment rate and lower rates of criminal arrests and teenage pregnancies, and required less welfare assistance than the preschool group that had not been exposed to educare.

9.1 Evidence from similar studies

In addition to the *Perry Preschool Study*, other long-term studies have provided evidence that good programmes for young children living in poverty produce statistically significant long-term benefits. All the programmes serviced preschool children who were living in poverty and were at special risk of school failure. The programmes studied included several different forms of provision.

When compared with children who had not participated in good programmes, young children who were living in poverty and had attended good programmes demonstrated the following characteristics:

- Fewer students were placed in special education or retained in any grade.
- More young people graduated from high school.
- The preschool group averaged higher on achievement tests over the years.
- Preschool attenders were arrested less often than the group that had not attended preschool.

Early childhood education seems to produce its long-term effect through equipping children with life-skills and enabling them to be more successful students. Simply phrased: good early childhood programmes contribute to the development of young children who live in poverty and those whose mothers are in the labour force.

The only South African study, a series of evaluation studies by Short and Biersteker (1984) on children in the Athlone community in the Western Cape, followed the scholastic progress of children who had participated in the *Early Learning Centre* (ELC) nursery school programme between 1972 and 1974 and had been followed up to age 15–17 years.

The three evaluation studies looked at:

- the extent to which the ELC programme prepared disadvantaged children for school;
- the effects of the ELC programme on various aspects of psychosocial behaviour, including adjustment to primary school and language ability at the end of the children's first quarter in primary school; and
- the follow-through data on the scholastic progress of these children throughout their primary school years and up to the end of 1980.

Results of the study indicate that:

- More children from middle-class homes obtain higher scores on intelligence and language tests than children from lower-class homes.

The inference is that middle-class children are better prepared for school.

- Mean scores and the percentage of children scoring above the median increase in proportion to the length of time spent in the programme, while the number of ELC children obtaining very low scores decreased with longer periods in the programme.
- The ELC programme had the effect of compensating for social class differences in school readiness.
- There is some support for the hypothesis that the ELC programme had an effect on preparing children for school.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that lower-class children who had participated in the ELC programme for 2½ years obtained mean scores equal to their more middle-class peers attending a traditional nursery school programme, and greater scores than the 'unschooled' lower-class group and the lower-class children attending a traditional nursery school. This suggests that the ELC programme helped to overcome the effects of disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Short and Biersteker 1984).

The short-term follow-up study by the same authors assessed the effects of participation in the ELC programme on some aspects of the children's psychosocial and linguistic behaviour in the school situation on the basis of ratings given by the primary school teachers. The hypothesis was that children who had been exposed to the ELC programme for longer periods would manifest more creative inquisitiveness, 'good student' behavioural traits, higher academic motivation, better socio-emotional adjustment, speedier adjustment to primary school, and greater linguistic competence than children who had been exposed to the programme for shorter periods and children of the same socio-economic background who had not had the benefit of preschool experience. The results indicated that on the measures used for creative inquisitiviness, acadamic motivation, and socio-emotional state in the ELC questionnaire on Adjustment to Primary School and Linguistic Competence, the ELC children generally obtained better mean scores than the 'unschooled' comparison group.

In the long-term scholastic follow-up study, the authors monitored the scholastic progress of children who had attended the ELC with a view to establishing whether, and to what extent, participation in the ELC programme had had an effect on later scholastic performance. The results indicated that up to Standard 2 the scholastic progress of the ELC cohort was, as a whole, generally considerably better than that of the coloured population.

The authors acknowledge methodological problems in the evaluation studies described above but are certain of the evidence in their findings that participation in the ELC nursery school programme helped prepare disadvantaged children for primary school.

In commenting on the implications of these and other findings on intervention programmes, the authors maintain that preschool programmes need not be narrowly focussed on scholastic requirements in order to effectively prepare children for school. In their opinion, the broader developmental approach provides young disadvantaged children with a more enriching educational experience and a sounder foundation for later general development. They also believe that preschool programmes should not underestimate the importance of fostering the social and emotional development of the disadvantaged child.

With regard to the length of the programme, findings indicate that one year of quality preschool education can give the schooling of five-year-old children from small, stable, low-income families a good start that greatly enhances their ability to utilize later scholastic opportunities, provided that their homes are educationally supportive. This implies that parents have at least a secondary level of education themselves; the family income is sufficient for all basic needs (for example: shelter, clothing, food and transport) and for some educative materials in the home; the adults have high aspirations and encourage their children, and the home has sufficient space for study. Children from large, stable families with sufficient income for basic needs, but who live in particularly overcrowded conditions, are also likely to benefit from a one-year programme, but the findings suggest that these children need a longer programme to consolidate their gains.

For both these groups, parents should be involved in programmes that will help them to fulfil their educational roles as effectively as possible through gaining a greater understanding of their children's needs, and developing their child-rearing skills. Almost all the successful preschool intervention programmes elsewhere have had active parent-involvement components.

Preschool education programmes can make a difference, and have lasting effects on the development and scholastic achievement of disadvantaged children. Intervention at the preschool level is most effective for children from families who can provide an educationally supportive environment during their school careers. It is essential but not sufficient for children from unsupportive homes, but it cannot remedy scholastic underachievement that is due to limited access or poor quality education in the school system.

10 Creating an environment for socio-educational development

The period from birth to the age of six is vital in terms of later socio-educational development, and it is therefore important that young children should receive a high quality educational experience at this time, particularly children who are exposed to the disadvantaged socio-economic conditions described earlier. Play is central to this phase, and has been described as the 'most important business' of childhood (Shmulker 1986). A recently published book by Edenhammar and Wahlund (1990) actually carries the title *No development without play,* and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* reinforces every child's right to play and recreation. Young children enhance their cognitive, emotional and social functioning and learn about themselves and the world around them through play.

A learning environment that is responsive to the need for active involvement, exploration and personal discovery is crucial for the enhancement of the young child's development in the educare program. An organized and well-resourced environment, where children can choose what they want to do and where, with whom and with which materials they want to play, is likely to offer conditions for optimal development. Major components of the learning environment are indoor and outdoor play areas, a daily routine, materials to use, a teacher, and parental involvement. These components are discussed separately.

10.1 Play areas

Play areas have a variety of play, work and learning activities directed towards the development of the child. The indoor play areas are designed so that children are given opportunities to make choices about where they will play and which materials they will use. Each playroom should have well-defined areas including a block area, an art area, a make-believe area, a toy area, and a book corner. Other areas could include a woodwork area, and sand and water play areas. There is an educational component to each of these areas.

Building with blocks is a favourite with children. Here they have opportunites to develop mathematic and science skills, to recognize and classify forms, shapes and sizes, and to explore space and direction horizontally and vertically.

The art area is set up with a variety of materials that can be selected by the child. Paint, glue, markers, paper, scissors and scrap-materials are included here. The child can combine the materials in his or her

own creative way. Cutting, pasting, drawing and other art activities help the child to improve hand control and to develop pre-writing skills. Freedom of expression is stimulated, and the final products promote the development of self-esteem and a positive self-image.

All children like to 'make believe' by playing various social roles such as mother, father, postman or doctor. This kind of play develops language skills, encourages co-operation, sharing, exchange of ideas and gives the child a chance to 'act out' and fantasize what he/she sees in everyday life.

Children enjoy a quiet place to look at books or have a story read to them. Here the child's vocabulary is expanded and language and pre-reading skills are developed. Puppets are often available for telling or acting out a story. The toy area includes toys, puzzles, construction sets, and games.

In addition to the basic areas found in the playroom, teachers and programme leaders can add other work areas such as a woodwork area where wood and real tools are available for construction, and sand and water areas with a sand/water table and materials such as sieves, funnels, and various containers. This arrangement offers tactile sensory experiences and facilitates social interaction.

The outdoor play area with large permanent pieces of equipment and safe, open spaces for unstructured activities is important for large muscle development. Our climate with its long sunny days is particularly suited to time outdoors where children play freely. Outside, a well-designed adventure area, many corners, trees and a cycle track can facilitate play.

10.2 The daily routine

The daily routine is an integrated one that caters for the complete developmental needs of children. There are, however, distinguishable activities. Each day is divided into approximately the same time schedule, with periods of free play, supervised creative activities, music and movement, adult-organized and led ring times, and essential routines such as toilet and mealtimes.

10.2.1 Free play

During free play, children are free to take part in the activities of their choice in the various play areas, with limited adult intervention. Free play can be indoors or outdoors, and children can choose to play alone or in groups. During free play, children have access to a range of toys,

materials and books. The 'time to choose' is important, since it offers the children a challenge to plan their own use of time.

10.2.2 Supervised creative activities

Creative activities help children to develop self-expression and creativity, and encourage them to handle and explore the uses of a variety of materials. Creative activities promote imagination, spontaneity, initiative, and self-confidence. Supervised creative activity time is teacher-initiated. The teacher plans the activity, observes the children doing the activity, and notes actions. In doing this, she constructs a picture of the child's level of competence. This helps in evaluating progress and diagnosing problems.

10.2.3 Music and movement

Music and movement activities, which are adult-organized, encourage self-expression, enable children to become acquainted with sounds and rhythm, and develop co-ordination of the large muscles. These activities also develop language and communication skills. Appreciation of culture and traditions is fostered.

10.2.4 Ring times

Ring times are also adult-organized and enable children to get together to participate in group activities. These include news time, story time and discussion time. Children are encouraged to participate. Benefits include language development and the acquisition of a wider vocabulary.

10.2.5 Essential routines

Within the educare centre children need to carry out certain essential routines such as washing, eating, using the toilet, and tidying up. Specific times are set aside for these activities, which also have a social-educational benefit.

During toilet routine children are taught hygiene and basic health care. Tidying up fosters a sense of responsibility. Children are given tidying up tasks as part of the activity. During meals and snack times children are encouraged to help prepare meals and snacks, to set the table, and to serve meals. This also encourages responsibility and organizational skills. A creative and innovative teacher can transform each of these essential routines into a 'fun' activity.

10.2.6 Outside play

Outside play is important since it is largely child-initiated and involves healthy physical activities with opportunities for both quiet reflection and individual play. The development of the large muscles and co-ordination skills are facilitated through the use of slides, swings, jungle gyms and trees.

10.3 Materials

The playroom should include a supply of materials that can be used in a variety of ways to encourage children to think creatively about the possibilities for their use. Books, puzzles, paper and paints, crayons, construction toys, games and musical instruments are common. Other materials that can be used in a playroom and which are usually found in the home include:

- kitchen utensils (kettle, egg beater, etcetera);
- old telephones;
- hats of all kinds;
- plastic containers;
- wooden off-cuts;
- buttons, bottle caps, corks, shells, acorns and other objects to sort;
- magazines;
- cardboard tubes (for example toilet rolls);
- dress-up clothes (fireman's hats, nurse's uniform, cook's apron, etcetera); and
- measuring cups, wooden spoons, canisters and other objects of different sizes.

In rural areas where some of these domestic items may not be readily available, stones, sticks, leaves and other natural materials could be used creatively.

10.4 The teacher/educare worker

The teacher or educare worker is of prime importance to the quality of any early childhood educare service. This person must be endowed with certain qualities in order to maximize the potential of each child. Parry and Archer (1974:139) write that "She needs to be someone who is essentially human; someone who likes people, especially children, and is not only full of warmth and goodwill toward them but determined to do

right by them. To achieve such ends she needs to be perceptive, sensitive, sympathetic and imaginative".

The qualities required fall into three areas: personal qualities, professional skills and practical skills.

At the *personal level* the teacher/educare worker should be:

- well adjusted, have a positive self-image, be confident and have good self-esteem;
- aware and sensitive to the needs of parents and children;
- respectful of the independence and autonomy of the families and of the children;
- unbiased and non-judgemental in her attitude towards race, class and gender; and
- a good communicator, especially with parents and children.

Professionally she must have:

- a good working knowledge of child development and educare in general;
- an understanding of the importance of play in the early years;
- an awareness of the cultural and social differences among the children and families with whom she works;
- the ability to observe and assess young children, particularly regarding their educational and health progress;
- a working knowledge of the regulations pertaining to early childhood educare; and
- the knowledge and confidence to speak to parents on a wide range of topics concerning children.

Practically she must be able to:

- plan and carry out the responsibilities of a teacher, inasmuch as these pertain to the daily routine;
- share information and skills with colleagues and parents; and
- create an environment in which children are happy and creative and in which they thrive.

10.5 Parent and community involvement in educare

Most of what children can do – talk, walk, use the toilet, eat and wash – has been developed in and around the home with the assistance of their parents. It is for this reason that parent involvement is seen as the key to enriching the lives of their children.

Parent and community involvement is essential because of the influence of parents and the community on the young child's life. Active parent involvement in the educare programme seems to produce more effective long-term gains for children (Pugh and De'ath 1989). This is supported by researchers (Bronfenbrenner 1974; Gray and Klaus 1970; Gordon 1971) who found that where parents were centrally involved in the educational process of their children, there were cognitive gains that were not lost over time.

Furthermore it is particularly in disadvantaged communities that parental involvement is needed for the development of the child and the success of the curriculum. A partnership approach in which the teacher and parents complement one another will produce benefits for the child, the teacher and the parents.

The question to be asked is: How can parents and community members be more involved in the educare programme? Pugh and De'ath (1989) outline a five-point scale identifying different roles that parents might assume:

- **Parents as supporters:** service-givers, clerical, custodial, maintenance, fund-raisers.
- **Parents as learners:** on parent education programmes, observing their children.
- **Parents as teachers** of their own children: taking equipment, toys and books to use at home.
- **Parents as teacher aides and volunteers** in the playroom: preparing materials, reading stories, working with children.
- **Parents as policy makers and partners:** committee members, learners, teachers and volunteers.

Our experience has shown that where parents are involved in the early education of their children, great benefits accrue to the parents through skills acquisition, heightened self-esteem and empowerment. The bridge between the home and the educare programme is also strengthened. The father's role is also important. Fathers have traditionally left the early education of their children to their wives. However, fathers have many skills to offer in educare programmes. Simple tasks such as putting up a swing, building a sand pit or painting the playroom are some of the ways to involve fathers. Others may have bookkeeping, medical and health-related skills, or even music or sport skills which could be utilized.

Working with parents in the early years is a process of getting to know, and learning from other parents. This will enable them to take co-responsibility for the child's development.

11 Summary and conclusion

Despite the desire for an environment that facilitates the full social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of the young preschool child, the social-political context in which the young black child in South Africa finds himself, most often serves to retard optimal development.

Environments that are characterized by poverty and insufficient food, shelter, housing, facilities and services; lack of safe and adequate supplies of drinking water, basic sanitation and refuse removal; and where there is continuous violence, do not enhance child development. The young black child faces this situation each day.

The effects of this situation are exibited most blatantly in the primary school drop-out rate in which only 49 out of every 100 pupils who begin Grade 1 (Sub A) eventually pass Grade 7 (Standard 5). The result is an increasing number of black South Africans who are illiterate. This figure is currently estimated at well over 60 per cent. Development and progress are not possible without eliminating or ending illiteracy. Literacy has a bearing on the economic well-being and life expectancy of people and also on any decrease in population growth.

One intervention strategy that goes to the root of the problem, is the provision of early childhood educare opportunities of varying kinds to our youngest children. Research results show the benefits of a developmental approach that takes account of the educational, welfare, health, housing and social needs of the child and his/her family. Educare, as has been stated, is presently located within a socio-economic political context that is hostile to its advancement. For young children to thrive, there must be political changes that will level the playing fields.

Improvement of the social conditions under which children live – housing, health, welfare, amenities and basic infrastructure – is conducive to improving the quality of their lives and will contribute towards school readiness. These improvements must, of course, be linked to enhancement of the quality of life of parents, particularly through economic upliftment. Providing educare services in a conducive environment will lay the foundation for a secure and productive future, not only for the individual child, but also for the family, the community and the nation.

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